Buck Owens

AND THE BUCKAROOS

The Buck Stops Here

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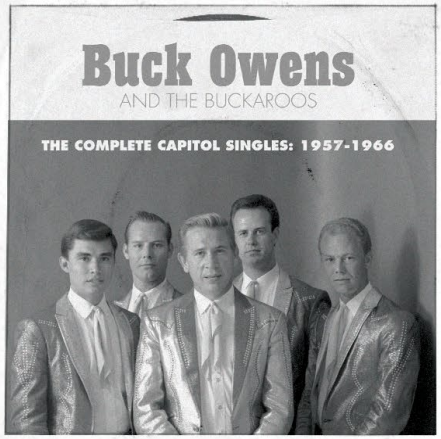

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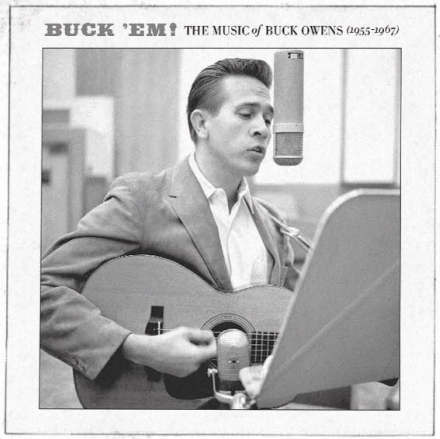

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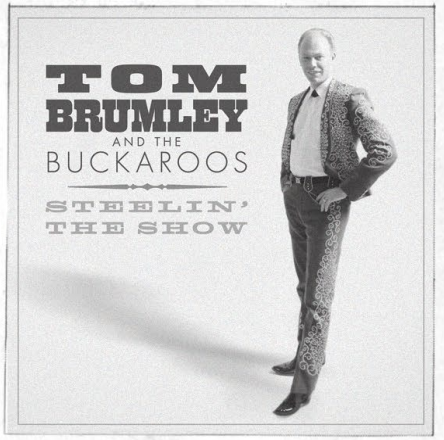

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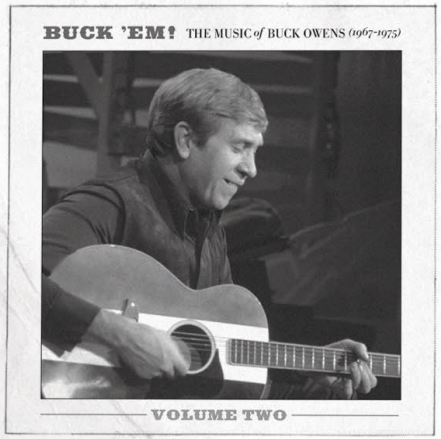

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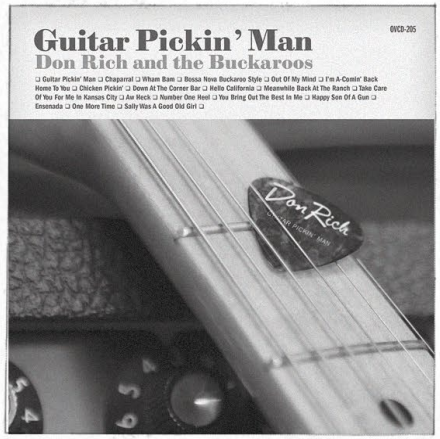

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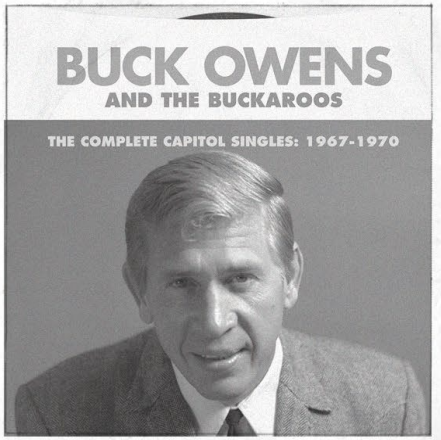

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By the dawn of the 1970s, Buck Owens had become much more than a country star. He'd landed 19 #1 hit singles on the *Billboard* chart and sold about ten million records—a massive number for a country artist in that era. He was also one of the co-stars of *Hee Haw*, a rural-themed musical variety show on the CBS television network, and had built a stable of artists signed to his management, booking, and publishing firms that included Merle Haggard, Freddie Hart, Tony Booth, Susan Raye, The Hagers, David Frizzell, and others. Owens presided over a multi-pronged business empire—including radio stations and considerable real estate holdings—that would make him the richest man in his adopted hometown of Bakersfield, California. Yes, Buck Owens had become much more than a country star. He was an *institution*.

Capitol Records declared September 1, 1970 "Buck Owens Day" at its iconic Hollywood tower, converting Studios A and B into a makeshift reception area where nearly 2,000 staffers, guests, and friends gathered to celebrate his success. Owens' producer Ken Nelson hosted the festivities, Don Rich and The Buckaroos provided the entertainment, and Capitol President Salvatore Iannucci presented Buck with a plaque naming him "Country Artist of the Decade." Though he was at the forefront of popularizing the "Bakersfield sound," the scene of the Capitol party was the actual space—100 miles south of Bakersfield—where most of Buck's hits were recorded up to that point. But that was changing. A lot of things would change for Buck Owens in the 1970s.

In 1969 Buck opened a state-of-the-art recording studio in a converted movie theater on Chester Avenue in Bakersfield. "At first, Ken Nelson would come up to produce the sessions," Buckaroos keyboardist Jim Shaw recalled, "but that didn't last very long. Eventually Buck took over the production duties himself." Though he'd already begun tweaking the formula a couple of years prior, when Owens started recording in his own studio (without the constraint of time limits) he stretched the boundaries of his established sound even further. With the departure of pedal steel guitarist JayDee Maness, this era found Buck incorporating new instrumentation that ranged from a banjo to a Moog synthesizer. Ironically, once he was actually recording in Bakersfield, Owens' music increasingly explored territory that was distinct from the twanging Telecasters and prominent pedal steel that are considered hallmarks of the "Bakersfield sound."

This third and final collection of Buck's Capitol singles includes the A and B sides of every release from 1971 to the end of his original Capitol era in 1975. With the exception of two duets with Susan Raye, everything here was recorded in Bakersfield with Buck in the producer's chair. Taken together, these songs represent a period of experimentation that reflects Owens' willingness to adapt to changing times and commercial tastes. It includes some pop-inflected country, some bluegrass, some novelty songs,

Don Rich with Buck on the set of *Hee Haw*

some slickly-polished productions, and some stripped-down ballads. In Buck's chest, however, beat a hard-driving honky-tonk heart that was never too far from the surface. The elements we associate with Buck's 1960s period are on display here, too. While his '70s output doesn't often earn the same attention as his earlier work, there is much from this period that should be celebrated.

The first track, a cover of Simon & Garfunkel's "Bridge Over Troubled Water" was an artistic risk. The *Bridge Over Troubled Water* LP featured two additional Paul Simon songs, Donovan's "Catch the Wind," and a cover of Bob Dylan's "Love Minus Zero/No Limit." It was a notable departure for Buck who, five years earlier, had responded via letter to a journalist requesting his comments on Dylan. "To deliberately talk, act, and look in a manner contrary to society," Buck wrote, "will be only a short lived success." Owens' thinking had clearly evolved, thanks largely to his lead guitarist, band leader, and musical soul mate Don Rich, who loved The Beatles and The Band as much as he loved George Jones. "Ken Nelson thought I'd lost my mind," Owens revealed in his autobiography regarding his decision to record songs by rock writers. "I didn't care. I felt like I needed to stretch—to make the kind of music that appealed to me at that point in my life."

Dramatically switching gears, Buck soon added banjoist Ronnie Jackson to the Buckaroos and recorded a bluegrass-flavored album that yielded the Top 5 singles "Ruby (Are You Mad)" and "Rollin' In My Sweet Baby's Arms."

The flip side of "Rollin' In My Sweet Baby's Arms" was "Corn Likker," a song written by Buddy Alan, Buck's then-22-year-old son he shared with singing ex-wife Bonnie Owens (who was, by that time, Mrs. Merle Haggard). Buck followed his bluegrass singles by dueting with Buddy on Bill Carlisle's "Too Old To Cut The Mustard." The humorous reflection on aging was an odd choice for a father-son duet, though not as odd as hearing the pair harmonize the line "wham bam, thank you ma'am" on the B-side—especially considering that the song was written by *both* Buddy's parents. *After* their divorce!

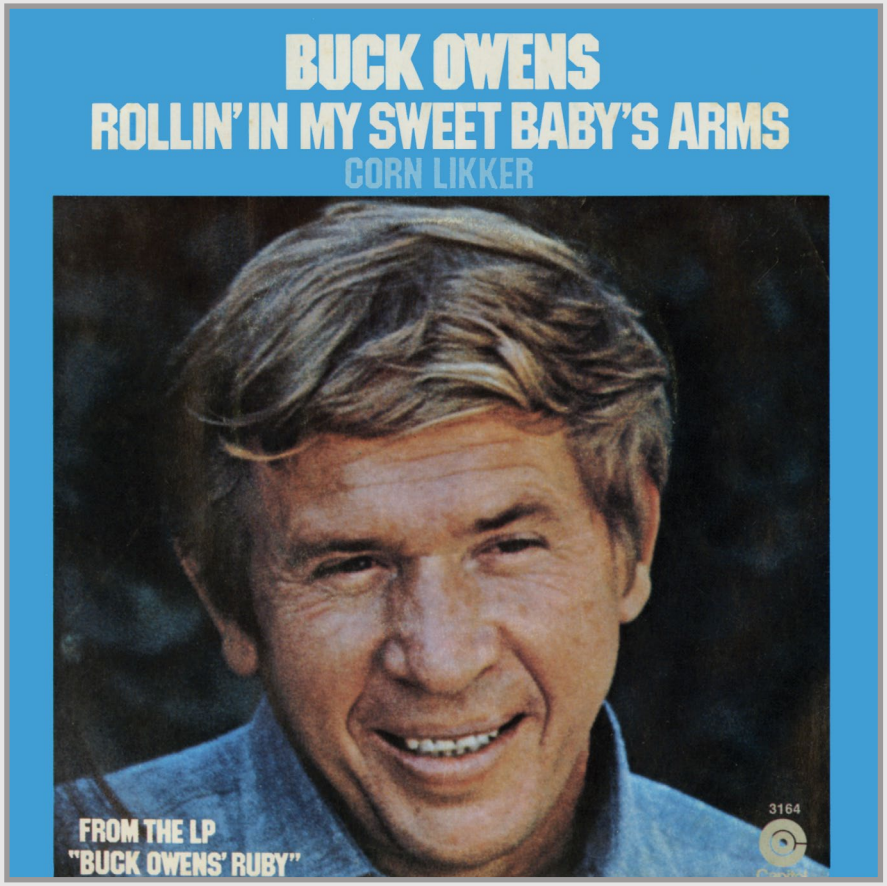
Though he recorded with his son, Buck's primary duet partner in the 1970s was Susan Raye. While their first three singles in 1970 were their most commercially successful, the production often veered into schmaltzy territory. Their eight sides on this collection, however, are more appealing, and generally hew closer to the sound Buck mastered in the previous decade. A cover of The Browns' "Looking Back To See," featuring steel guitar work by Ralph Mooney, is a particular highlight.

Buck was always at his best with a steel guitar in the band. Though Buddy Emmons played on several sessions in 1970 and 1971, The Buckaroos didn't officially replace JayDee Maness with a full-time steel man until Jerry Brightman joined the group in 1972. Though he'd played on "I'll Still Be Waiting For You," his first official sessions as a Buckaroo yielded the excellent single "You Ain't Gonna Have Ol' Buck To Kick Around No More," backed with "I Love You So Much It Hurts." The "vintage Buck" sound (those harmony vocals on the B-side!) ushered in a string of singles that embraced twisty guitar licks, crying steel guitar, and fiddle-driven shuffles. "In The Palm Of Your Hand," "Ain't It Amazing Gracie," and "Arms Full Of Empty" (the latter two recorded with Mooney just prior to Brightman joining the band) are artistic highlights of Buck's recorded output in the 1970s.

As good as that streak of singles sounds today, however, the production style didn't fit the country radio aesthetic of the early 1970s. All four songs charted, but none of them made it to the Top 10. Buck hadn't had a charting solo single fall shy of the Top 10 since 1962, and it was particularly frustrating considering he'd reached the top of the chart just prior to those releases with "Made In Japan."

Buck was a businessman. He was in uncharted territory—or at least a territory of the charts that was lower than anything he'd ever seen before—and he recognized the need to change course to recapture the listening audience. Since he'd had success with the mildly novelty-flavored "Made In Japan," he decided to triple down. Capitol issued a string of hokey novelty singles—"Big Game Hunter," "On The Cover Of The Music City News," and "(It's A) Monster's Holiday"—that gave him a fresh run of Top 10 hits in 1974. It was a commercial triumph, if not an artistic high point.

Buck's final single of 1974 was "Great Expectations," an appealing country waltz that also reached the Top 10. It appeared Buck was regaining his balance of commercial and artistic success, but the single's release was overshadowed by an unthinkable tragedy. Don Rich was killed in a motorcycle accident in July following a recording session at Buck's studio. He was only 32 years old, but had been by Buck's side for well over a decade as his musical "right arm," the original (and only consistent) Buckaroo, and Buck's best friend. Owens was devastated. "I honestly thought I wasn't going to be able to survive," he confessed



years later. "On the day Don died, something permanently changed inside me."

Four months after Rich was killed, Buck and the Buckaroos returned to the studio with Don Lee on guitar. They recorded "41st Street Lonely Hearts' Club," which features an instrumental hook with an appropriately-updated sound (for the time) against a track and melody that's reminiscent of Buck's classic recording of "Act Naturally." It was a balance of the old and the new that worked very well and should have established a new template for Buck's sound going forward.

Unfortunately "41st Street Lonely Hearts' Club" barely crawled into the Top 20. It deserved much more attention than it got, but Buck's depression was taking a toll on his enthusiasm to engage an audience. Both he and the executives at Capitol Records felt like their relationship had likely run its course. Buck made plans to depart the label after one final album. Ultimately, Capitol released the singles "The Battle Of New Orleans" and "Country Singer's Prayer," but shelved the rest of the LP in favor of releasing a final compilation of hits instead. It was a quiet and unsatisfying ending to a long creative alliance that helped define West Coast country music.

After a stint at Warner Bros. and nearly a decade away from recording, Dwight Yoakam coaxed Owens out of semi-retirement in 1988. They hit #1 with their duet of "Streets Of Bakersfield," prompting Capitol Records to re-sign Buck for three albums in the late '80s and early '90s. Though delayed, it was fitting for the Baron of Bakersfield to ultimately walk away from Capitol as a universally-recognized musical icon. While his "freight train" sound of the 1960s has earned more accolades in recent years, the recordings presented here are an important chapter in interpreting the entirety of Buck Owens' career. To neglect this era is to fail to understand the totality of Owens' commercial instincts and musical artistry.

—Scott B. Bomar
Los Angeles, CA
February 25, 2019

PERSONNEL

BUCK OWENS AND THE BUCKAROOS:

Buck Owens: vocals, guitar

Don Rich: lead guitar, fiddle, backing vocals
(except Disc 2, Tracks 13–14, 17–19)

Jim Shaw: keyboards, harmonica, jaw harp, backing vocals
(except Disc 1, Tracks 14, 16; Disc 2, Track 15)

Jerry Brightman: steel guitar, Dobro
(except Disc 1, Tracks 1–10, 12–16, 21; Disc 2, Tracks 3, 15, 17, 19)

Ronnie Jackson: banjo, guitar
(except Disc 1, Tracks 1–2, 11–12, 14, 16–20, 22; Disc 2, Tracks 1–2, 4, 6, 13–19)

Doyle Curtsinger: bass, backing vocals
(except Disc 2, Track 14)

Jerry Wiggins: drums, percussion

WITH:

Susan Raye: duet vocals
(Disc 1, Tracks 9–10, 15–16; Disc 2, Tracks 1–2, 15–16)

Buddy Alan Owens: duet vocals
(Disc 1, Tracks 7–8); guitar (Disc 1, Tracks 7–8, 15, 17–18, 20–21; Disc 2, Tracks 3, 15)

Doyle Holly: guitar
(Disc 1, Tracks 12, 14, 16); bass (Disc 2, Track 15)

Al Bruneau: lead National guitar
(Disc 1, Track 16)

Billy Sampson: guitar
(Disc 1, Track 16)

Jay Dee Maness: steel guitar
(Disc 2, Track 15)

Buddy Emmons: steel guitar Dobro
(Disc 1, Tracks 9–10, 12, 4, 16)

Ralph Mooney: steel guitar
(Disc 1, Tracks 15, 21; Disc 2, Track 3)

Earl "Poole" Ball: piano
(Disc 1, Tracks 14, 16; Disc 2, Track 15)

Jim and John Hager: backing vocals
(Disc 2, Track 15)

The Ray Sisters (Shirley Palmer, Patti Boyt and LaVonne Payne): backing vocals
(Disc 1, Track 22; Disc 2, Track 6)

LaVonne Payne or Joyce Hawthorne: backing vocals
(Disc 2, Tracks 8, 10–12)

Sylvia Caricker: screams
(Disc 2, Track 9)

Don Lee: guitar
(Disc 2, Tracks 13–14, 17–19)

Jana Jae: fiddle
(Disc 2, Tracks 14, 17–19)

Terry Christofferson: guitar, steel guitar
(Disc 2, Tracks 17, 19)

STRINGS:
(Disc 1, Track 16, overdubbed on February 24, 1970):

David Gates: leader and arranger

Israel Baker, James Getzoff, Lou Klass, William Kurasch, Ralph Schaefer and Gerald Vinci: violin

Ray Armand and Ray Kelley: cello

ORIGINAL RECORDINGS PRODUCED AT BUCK OWENS STUDIOS IN BAKERSFIELD, CALIFORNIA

Except Disc 2, Track 15 recorded August 19, 1969, and Disc 1, Track 16 recorded February 3, 1970, at Capitol Recording Studio, Hollywood, California, Produced by Ken Nelson.

Note: Existing information on dates for tracks recorded at Buck Owens Studios are reflective of when sessions were reported to the label and musician's union. Tracks were typically developed over multiple sessions prior to that date. Since these dates do not represent the actual date of recording, we've chosen not to list them here.

TRACK LIST

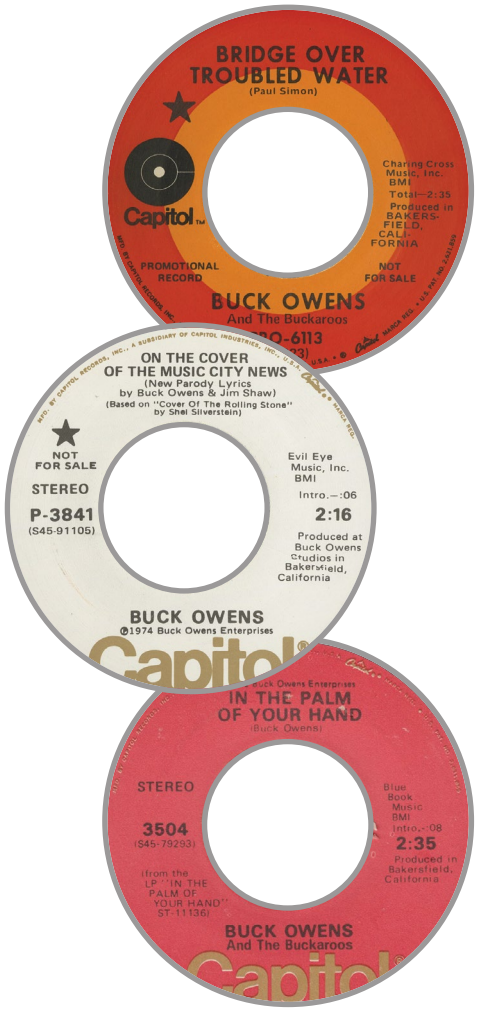
DISC ONE

1. **BRIDGE OVER TROUBLED WATER**
   (Paul Simon)
2. **(I'M GOIN') HOME**
   (Terry Clements/John English)
   Capitol single 3023 (1/11/71); *#9*
3. **RUBY (ARE YOU MAD)**
   (Cousin Emmy)
4. **HEARTBREAK MOUNTAIN**
   (Buck Owens)
   Capitol single 3096 (4/12/71); *#3*
5. **ROLLIN' IN MY SWEET BABY'S ARMS**
   (Trad., arr/Buck Owens)
6. **CORN LIKKER**
   (Buddy Alan)
   Capitol single 3164 (8/16/71); *#2*
7. **TOO OLD TO CUT THE MUSTARD**
   Buck & Buddy
   (Bill Carlisle)
8. **WHAM BAM**
   Buck & Buddy
   (Buck Owens)
   Capitol single 2080 (11/8/71); *#1*
9. **SANTA'S GONNA COME IN A STAGECOACH**
   Buck Owens & Susan Raye
   (Don Rich/Red Simpson)
10. **ONE OF EVERYTHING YOU GOT**
    Buck Owens & Susan Raye
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3225 (11/22/71)
11. **I'LL STILL BE WAITING FOR YOU**
    (Buck Owens)
12. **FULL TIME DADDY**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3262 (1/17/72); *#8*
13. **MADE IN JAPAN**
    (Bob Morris/Faye Morris)
14. **BLACK TEXAS DIRT**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3314 (4/3/72); *#1*
15. **LOOKING BACK TO SEE**
    Buck Owens & Susan Raye
    (Jim Ed Brown/Maxine Brown)
16. **CRYIN' TIME**
    Buck Owens & Susan Raye
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3368 (6/19/72); *#13*
17. **YOU AIN'T GONNA HAVE OL' BUCK TO KICK AROUND NO MORE**
    (Buck Owens)
18. **I LOVE YOU SO MUCH IT HURTS**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3429 (8/28/72); *#13*
19. **IN THE PALM OF YOUR HAND**
    (Buck Owens)
20. **GET OUT OF TOWN BEFORE SUNDOWN**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3504 (12/4/72); *#23*
21. **AIN'T IT AMAZING, GRACIE**
    (Buck Owens/Glen Garrison)
22. **THE GOOD OLD DAYS (ARE HERE AGAIN)**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3563 (3/5/73); *#14*

DISC TWO

1. **THE GOOD OLD DAYS (ARE HERE AGAIN)**
   Buck Owens & Susan Raye
   (Buck Owens)
2. **WHEN YOU GET TO HEAVEN (I'LL BE THERE)**
   Buck Owens & Susan Raye
   (Buck Owens)
   Capitol single 3601 (5/21/73); *#35*
3. **ARMS FULL OF EMPTY**
   (Buck Owens)
4. **SONGWRITER'S LAMENT**
   (Buck Owens)
   Capitol single 3688 (7/30/73); *#27*
5. **BIG GAME HUNTER**
   (Buck Owens)
6. **THAT LOVING FEELING**
   (Buck Owens)
   Capitol single 3769 (11/5/73); *#8*
7. **ON THE COVER OF THE MUSIC CITY NEWS**
   (Shel Silverstein/Buck Owens/Jim Shaw)
8. **STONY MOUNTAIN WEST VIRGINIA**
   (Buck Owens)
   Capitol single 3841 (2/25/74); *#9*
9. **(IT'S A) MONSTERS' HOLIDAY**
   (Buck Owens)
10. **GREAT EXPECTATIONS (B-SIDE VERSION)**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3907 (6/24/74); *#6*
11. **GREAT EXPECTATIONS (A-SIDE VERSION)**
    (Buck Owens)
12. **LET THE FUN BEGIN**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 3976 (11/4/74); *#8*
13. **41st STREET LONELY HEARTS' CLUB**
    (Jim Shaw/Dennis Knutson)
14. **WEEKEND DADDY**
    (Buck Owens/Danny Shatswell/Dennis Knutson)
    Capitol single 4043 (3/10/75); *#19*
15. **LOVE IS STRANGE**
    Buck Owens & Susan Raye
    (Ethel Smith/Mickey Baker/Sylvia Robinson)
16. **SWEETHEARTS IN HEAVEN**
    Buck Owens & Susan Raye
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 4100 (6/16/75); *#20*
17. **THE BATTLE OF NEW ORLEANS**
    (Jimmy Driftwood)
18. **RUN HIM TO THE ROUND HOUSE NELLIE (YOU MIGHT CORNER HIM THERE)**
    (Buck Owens/Dennis Knutson)
    Capitol single 4138 (9/8/75); *#51*
19. **COUNTRY SINGER'S PRAYER**
    (Jim Shaw/Robert John Jones)
20. **MEANWHILE BACK AT THE RANCH**
    (Buck Owens)
    Capitol single 4181 (11/10/75)

Numbers in italic following single release information indicate the peak position for the A-side on *Billboard* magazine's weekly Country chart.



Compilation Produced for Release by Patrick Milligan

Original Recordings Produced at Buck Owens Studios in Bakersfield, California except Disc 1, Track 16 and Disc 2, Track 15 Produced by Ken Nelson at Capitol Recording Studio, Hollywood, California

Mastered by Michael Graves at Osiris Studio, Los Angeles, California

Liner Notes: Scott B. Bomar

Art Direction and Design: Greg Allen

Photos courtesy of The Buck Owens Private Foundation

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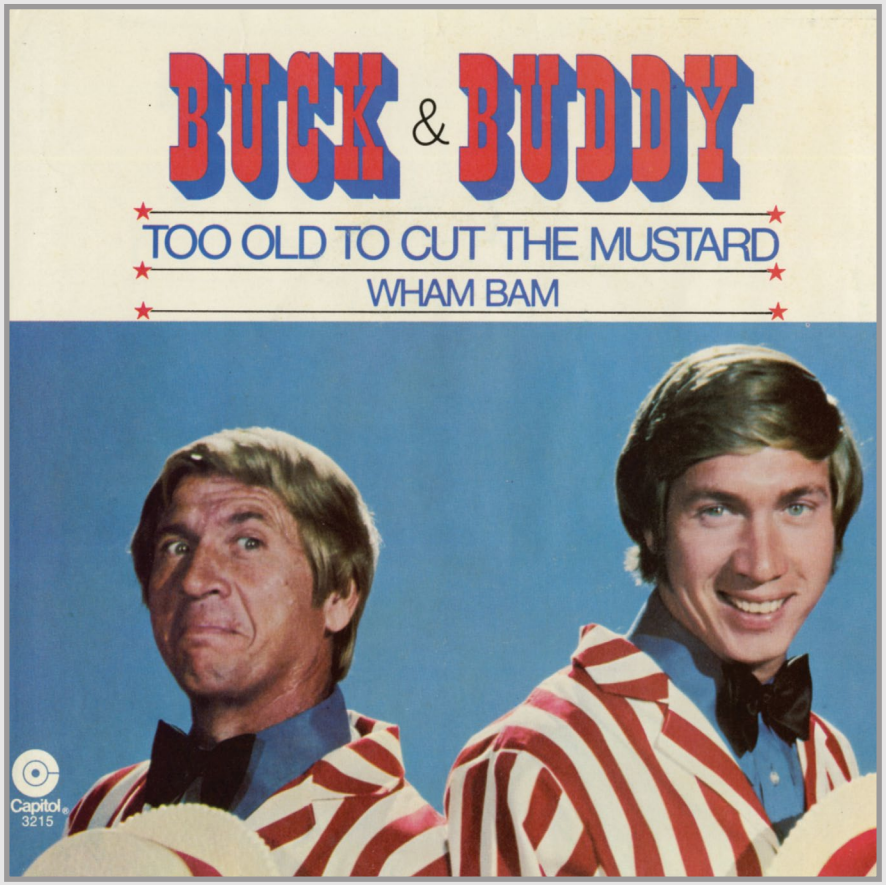

(Left–right): Buddy Alan Owens, Doyle Curtsinger, Susan Raye, Jerry Wiggins, Don Rich, Buck Owens, Jim Shaw, Ronnie Jackson

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